

2008

Teaching Young Children to Read by Combining Music, Lyrics, and Text: How to Teach an Old Song New Tricks!

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Recommended Citation

Dove, Maria Ed.D., "Teaching Young Children to Read by Combining Music, Lyrics, and Text: How to Teach an Old Song New Tricks!" (2008). *Faculty Works: Education*. 57.
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Chapter Six

Teaching Young Children to Read by Combining Music, Lyrics, and Text: How to Teach an Old Song New Tricks!

Maria G. Dove

When he was young, my son Jason hid every time I wanted him to read. He enjoyed listening to stories and looked eagerly at the illustrations, but he avoided reading on his own. When Jason tried to read out loud, he stumbled over every other word until he became frustrated. His poor attempts at reading made him feel like a failure.

When I entered his room one day, I was surprised to find him reading a book called *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* by Michael Rosen, a children's story composed from the popularly sung nursery school rhyme. When I asked him to read the story to me out loud, I was amazed at how fluently he read. Jason giggled with glee as he read the pages about the naughty little rabbit given a stern warning by the good fairy about his bad behavior. Jason's familiarity with the nursery song gave him the confidence to try reading the book by himself.

Jason practiced reading the same text over and over again, making note of the words he did not know. It was the first time he ever experienced pleasurable reading, and he was very proud to read on his own. Unfamiliar words did not seem to bother him, and he wanted to learn every one of them so he could read without hesitation. His personal reading experience helped me develop a strategy for reading fluency using lyrics and music.

WHAT IS READING FLUENCY?

Fluency is the link between simple word recognition and understanding text as a whole. Fluent readers read aloud easily without having to decode each word. They are able to focus their attention on the meaning of the text. Most often, young children are hindered by their lack of word recognition and thus reading becomes a struggle. Reading familiar text provides children with immediate success and develops confidence in their reading ability. Once children are convinced they can read using text they know, they are likely to try to read less familiar print.

GETTING STARTED

Most children enjoy listening to and singing well-known songs. Popular children's songs, available on CD, may be purchased from a variety of sources or borrowed from the local library. In addition, songs may be downloaded from places on the Web at no cost or purchased at sites like iTunes. Albums such as "30 Toddler Songs" by Madacy Kids can be downloaded for fewer than four dollars.

Begin by choosing songs that are repetitious and have simple melodies. Play one of the songs to your child until it becomes familiar. Songs such as "If You're Happy and You Know It," "The Bear Went Over the Mountain," and "The Wheels on the Bus" are examples of a few with lyrics that repeat through a simple tune. Easy verses allow songs to be sung without musical accompaniment. In this way, songs may be sung regardless of where you and your child may be—at home, in a car or bus, or walking through a park. One of my favorite places to sing with my children was on long drives in the family station wagon.

FINDING READING MATERIAL

Reading material that has converted song lyrics into picture books is widely available from a variety of publishers. Many are beautifully illus-

trated and inviting to youngsters' eyes. Here are some examples of song lyrics published as storybooks:

If You're Happy and You Know It, illustrated by Jane Cabrera (Scholastic, Inc., 2003)

The Wheels on the Bus, illustrated by Wendy Straw (Borghesi & Adams, 2000)

Peanut Butter and Jelly, illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott (Dutton, 1987)

There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, illustrated by Simms Taback (Viking, 1997)

After your child becomes familiar with a particular song, introduce the matching storybook. Read the story to your child first and share the illustrations. It will not be long before your child is grabbing the book from your hands to read it on his or her own.

MAKING YOUR OWN BOOKS

Can't find a ready-made book to match your child's favorite song? Why not create one! By simply cutting pages to equal size and stapling them together, you and your child can write a book that matches any song's lyrics. You may preprint the words or write them by hand leaving room for illustrations. Have your child participate in making the drawings that match the lyrics using crayons, markers, stickers, and even paint (if you have courage and do not mind cleaning messes when they occur)! If your child does not particularly enjoy drawing, you may prepare the book ahead of time. If you are technologically inclined, you may want to try your hand at creating a book on your home computer. You will find clip art on the Web to match any lyrics of your choosing.

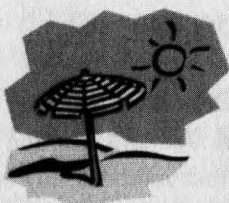
Below is an illustrated example of one of my granddaughter's favorite songs from the Beatles entitled "An Octopus's Garden." I used Microsoft Office Online available at <http://office.microsoft.com> to find suitable clipart to insert with the text.

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An Octopus's Garden



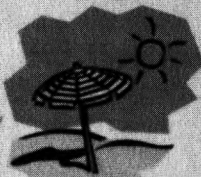
I'd like to be under the sea
in an octopus's garden in the shade.



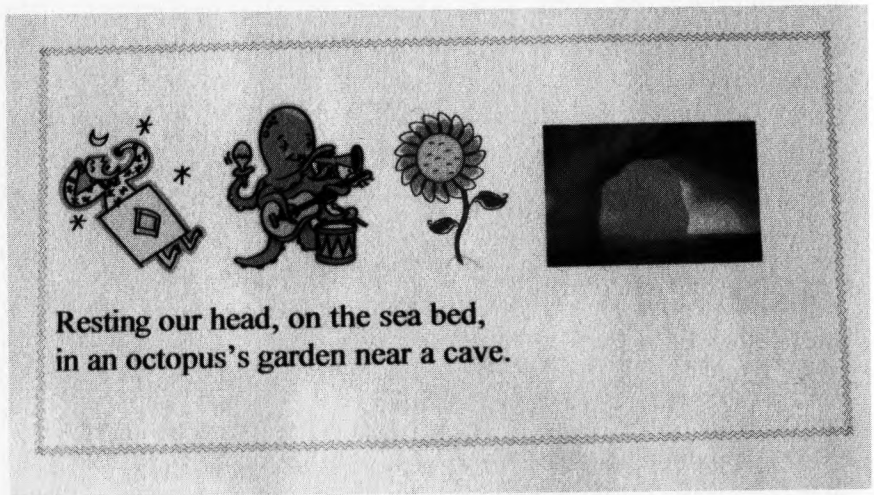
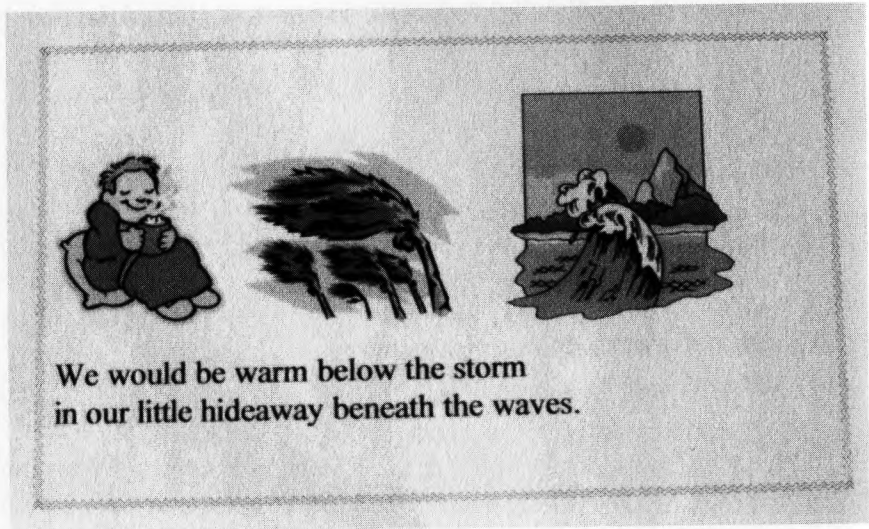
He'd let us in, knows where we've been,
in his octopus's garden in the shade.



I'd ask my friends to come and see
an octopus's garden with me.



I'd like to be, under the sea
in an octopus's garden in the shade.



CONCLUSION

Reading fluency develops over time through a lot of practice. Children with strong reading ability have many opportunities to read on a regular basis. Using song lyrics to motivate children to read is an amusing and enjoyable activity. When learning is fun, children are more apt to participate regularly.